

Tonight As Noon

Let Lips Do

What Hands Do

Let Lips Do What Hands Do by **Tonight.At.Noon**

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Summary: They meet by chance in the woods.

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"Jonathan! Jonathan!"

He can hear her. Barely, but he can hear her soft voice shouting for him. She sounds scared. Terrified. He crouches by the tree where Nancy's things lie scattered, straining his ears. Slime surrounds him. The base of the tree pulsates like a beating heart.

Nancy is in there.

"Nancy!" he screams. "Nancy, I'm right here!"

A hand shoots through the space in the trunk, but it is not Nancy's. No, it is large and scaly. It has claws which wrap around Jonathan's neck. Struggling in its vice grip, he clamps his own hands around the creature's wrist, scratching and tugging as his vision begins to blur.

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Jonathan wakes gasping for breath. It is the fifth time this week nightmares have followed him to sleep. Clutching his chest—which has grown painfully tight—he blindly searches for the light switch above his bed. He flicks it upwards and the room becomes bathed in a harsh orange glow. He knows he is safe—the monster has been killed, Will is sleeping soundly in his own bed—but he frantically looks around the room, fearing something dangerous has entered. Nothing is visibly there, he concludes after a minute. He can breathe.

They started over a month ago, the nightmares. In them, the monster has returned—or maybe he never truly died. He is back in the woods, not always with Nancy. Sometimes he is with his mother or Will. Occasionally he's with that strange girl Mike hoarded in his basement. Each time, whoever his mind decides to conjure disappears through a portal like the one he and Nancy found in the trunk of a tree. They scream for him, but their cries for help are almost muted. He screams back until his throat bleeds. He finds where they were

taken by the monster, and when he reaches his hand out to rescue them, the creature attacks him. It comes after them all. It kills them all.

He has gotten better at waking up before that happens, but he is not always so lucky. Once in a while, he will remain enveloped in slumber, forced to watch as the monster picks them off one by one. Those nights, he awakens drenched in sweat, his face streaked with hot tears.

He is slowly becoming a zombie with how little sleep he has been getting. He finds himself nodding off at work, zoning out into oblivion while driving. It isn't safe.

He needs sleep.

But he is too afraid that thing will come back. Take them to the Upside Down and hold them like he did Barb until they are all dead and gone and forgotten. He can't sleep with worries like that plaguing his mind.

Jonathan climbs out of bed and sits on the floor. He has found that exercise helps calm him after the nightmares. He begins with simple crunches, stopping only when the muscles in his stomach are shouting at him to stop. Standing, he looks towards his window. He itches to run outside. Quickly, he changes out of his pyjamas and into some warm clothes. Winter has fully taken over Hawkins.

Unlocking the window, his new camera hanging around his neck, Jonathan opens it and starts walking, no clear destination in mind.

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When he reaches the woods, he wonders how he ended up there. He hates this place. It is cold and coated in a thick blanket of dead, frozen leaves. On the other hand, he can't imagine his feet would have taken him anywhere else. This is where it started. Where everything started. His friendship with Nancy, their search for the monster, the discovery of a portal to the Upside Down.

He hasn't seen much of Nancy since school started up again following

winter break, but she always makes an effort to speak to him when they pass each other in the hallway and when he collects Will from the Wheeler household. He finds himself smiling when she does this. More so now that her and Steve have ended things. Smiling feels strange, after all that's happened. His mouth hurts when he comes home. But it's a welcome pain. The good kind of pain.

He supposes they're connected now, he and Nancy. Tethered together. A link born out of a horrific event. It's strange, but he swears he can sometimes hear what she's thinking. At least, he can sense what she's feeling. Most likely it is all in his head, but he holds on to it. It is one of the only things that keeps him afloat.

Jonathan wanders the woods, crackling leaves as he moves and snapping pictures of the things he finds. The sun is rising behind harsh grey clouds, giving the wooded area a smoky glow. It's haunting, the world around him. Soon, he is approaching the tree. *That* tree. The one that pulled Nancy into the Upside Down. Its trunk has sealed shut now, but flickering behind his eyes are images of the once sticky, throbbing opening. Fear creeps through him, setting his blood ablaze. He was scared that night. Terrified he had lost Nancy, that the creature was going to come for him next and leave his mother well and truly alone. He remembers when Nancy's hand shot out—he thought he was going to die.

As he stands, staring at the tree, the sky, thick with ashen clouds, bursts. Droplets of heavy rain begin lashing against his face. Awakening from his stupor, Jonathan stuffs his camera underneath his sweater and backs away from the tree. He's about to head home when he spots a figure moving towards him, their body a hazy mass in the rain. Jonathan backs away, but the figure continues advancing. His body numb from the cold and the rain, he barely feels it when his spine knocks against the wooden, spiked barrier of a large oak tree. Looking around frantically, he tries to spot something he can use as a weapon, but the entirety of his surroundings has become haloed and fogged due to the rain.

"Jonathan," the body says. They sound feminine and scared and frozen. "Jonathan what are you doing out here?"

The owner of the soft voice approaches. As it gets closer and closer to

where he is trapped against the tree, he realises it's Nancy Wheeler. He frowns, adrenaline running rampant through him. His heart is pummelling against his ribs.

"Nancy?" he exclaims. "What are you doing here?"

She gets closer. Too close. Her ghostly breath washes over his face. She pulls her eyebrows together. "I asked you first."

Blinking, Jonathan waves his head around in disbelief at her response. Without hesitating, he grabs Nancy's hand. Despite the freezing rain click-clacking over him, he feels a sudden heat zip through his veins. "Come on," he shouts. The rain has started coming down heavier. He can barely hear his own thoughts. "There's an abandoned shed along here. We can wait there until the rain stops."

Nancy complies, following along behind him until they reach a broken down shack. Jonathan pushes them inside and shuts the door quick, panting. Releasing Nancy, he presses his palms against the farthest wall and bows his head, inhaling sharply. His heart is still running rampant in his chest. A hand gently rests over his shoulder, causing his head to jerk up. Nancy is by his side, her fingertips burning his skin through the soaked fabric covering his torso. Her face is pinched in concern for him. He notices her lips are quivering and blue, and from her eyes he sees water leaking.

"I came to find answers," she says loudly, the rain slamming against the wooden shed. He waits for her to continue. "Barb . . . I still don't understand any of this," —she motions around them with the hand that is not attached to his shoulder— "but I'm trying to."

In a sense, he came for the same reason. To find answers. To try against all odds to make sense of the strange things that occurred in their small town not even eight weeks ago. So, he nods, hoping the motion conveys his comprehension of her explanation.

Nancy drops her hand, but she doesn't take her eyes off of him. He feels like a tiny amoeba, insignificant and simple, being studied beneath a microscope. But Nancy, she looks at him as though she is trying desperately to understand him. As if he is the most complex creature to ever cross her path.

He isn't.

"You get them, too, don't you." She hasn't asked a question, nor has she provided any additional information.

Jonathan stands there, confused, water still cascading down his nose. "Get what?"

Nancy leans in close, like she had done earlier when she first approached him in the woods. Only this time she is even closer. He sees a small scar above her nose he has never noticed before. It is in the shape of a crescent moon. The nail on his pinky finger could fit perfectly in the groove.

"Nightmares," she says, quieter now, and he can feel the word float from her mouth to his lungs. "About this place. The monster." Nancy looks to the ground before once more flicking her eyes upward towards his. "It's like it's still here."

"Hey, it can't get to us anymore," Jonathan insists, though he doesn't know why. He still wakes in fear of the creature's return. Nancy seems to know this. "We're safe."

"I can hear Mike crying at night." Nancy looks away again, over her shoulder at a large crack in the shed's rotten wood. Rain spits through the open strip. "He sneaks down to the basement and sits in Eleven's fort, sobbing until he falls asleep. Barb's parents had to bury an empty coffin. That thing might be dead, but it destroyed this town. We're far from safe. We're all damaged goods." Bitterness rises and spreads through each of her words until she is dripping acid saliva on to the wooden boards beneath their feet.

Jonathan has never seen her angry before.

Suddenly, she jerks her head around and stares helplessly into his eyes. Nancy Wheeler is no damsel in distress, but Jonathan is overcome by the sense that he needs to rescue her. And that she, in turn, needs to rescue him.

"I'm cold, Jonathan," she says, and he knows instinctively it is time for him to open his arms.

He does so, holding on to her as the rain whips harshly outside. Nancy clings to him, her claws attaching themselves to the loose strings in his jacket. Her wet, frozen hair rests against his chest. They remain like this until the rain slows to a light sputter, but Jonathan feels as though no time has passed when Nancy disentangles herself from him.

"Jonathan," she rasps. "No more nightmares."

Nancy rises, standing on her tiptoes. Her hands grasp his elbows, causing him to take ahold of her waist. Inhaling a pointed breath as his fingertips grip her, Jonathan's stunned brain attempts to quickly evaluate the situation, but there's a numbness inside of him preventing him from understanding anything that is going on. But he has seen enough films, flipped through enough of his mother's vulgar romance novels, to predict what will happen next.

Nancy Wheeler will kiss him. She will allow her eyes to close and press her blue lips against his, holding them there until their lungs are screaming for fresh air. And then she will break away from him, their cheeks both ruddy and warm with blood. Neither will say anything more, and they will leave the shed, not to see each other again until Monday where, in the hallway, they will share a small, shy smile with one another as they walk together side by side.

And Nancy Wheeler does not let him down. Veins swelling as his heart pumps quicker and quicker, Jonathan holds his breath in anticipation. When her lips finally seal onto his, there is no sensation of cold. Just warmth. Despite the rain and the wintertime temperature, he feels warm as Nancy's mouth lies against his.

It is perfect. A sign they are not as broken as she thinks.

Once it is over, Jonathan remains still, unsure of what to do next. His cheeks are flushed, his stomach rolling. He can hear his heart beating like a drum. He wonders if Nancy can hear it, too. Opening her eyes, she releases his elbows and rests the flats of her feet back down. He lets go of her as well, slowly, his fingertips grazing her sides as his arms drop.

There are no more lingering glances or words shared between them.

Nancy turns on her heels and leads the way out of the shed. Their lips could not have been fused for more than five seconds, but Jonathan notices as they begin walking towards Nancy's house that the rain has officially stopped. Clouds still cover the sun, casting a hellish glow on the barren trees and blanketed ground, but he thinks the world couldn't look more stunning.

No more nightmares, he says to himself as they walk. *No more.*